

# A Comparative Analysis of Online Advertising and Traditional Advertising: Mechanisms, Effectiveness, and Strategic Integration

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**Abstract:** *This paper presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of online advertising and traditional advertising, examining their respective mechanisms, historical evolution, economic structures, measurability, and strategic implications for modern organisations. As global advertising expenditure surpassed 900 billion US dollars in 2024, with digital channels now commanding approximately 68 percent of total spend, understanding the dynamics, advantages, and limitations of both paradigms has become critical for marketers, scholars, and business leaders. Traditional advertising — encompassing television, radio, print, outdoor, and direct mail — dominated commercial communications throughout the twentieth century and continues to hold relevance in brand-building and mass-market outreach. Online advertising, which includes search engine marketing, social media advertising, programmatic display, influencer partnerships, and connected television, has fundamentally altered the landscape through precision targeting, real-time optimisation, and granular performance measurement. Drawing upon peer-reviewed literature, industry reports from organisations such as eMarketer, Nielsen, and the Interactive Advertising Bureau, and case studies from global brands including Procter and Gamble, Nike, and Coca-Cola, this paper synthesises existing knowledge and proposes an original Integrated Advertising Effectiveness Model for strategic channel allocation. The findings confirm that optimal outcomes emerge not from a binary preference for one paradigm but from a theoretically informed, data-driven integration of online and traditional channels calibrated to campaign objectives, audience characteristics, and budgetary constraints.*

**Keywords:** Online Advertising, Traditional Advertising, Digital Marketing, Programmatic Advertising, Integrated Advertising, Brand Strategy, Media Effectiveness, Consumer Behaviour

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Context

Advertising is one of the most pervasive forces in modern commercial society. Since the first newspaper advertisements appeared in seventeenth-century England and the first paid radio broadcast aired in the United States in 1922, the practice of paid commercial communication has evolved in concert with the dominant technologies of each era. For the greater part of the twentieth century, advertising was synonymous with what scholars and practitioners now call traditional media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, outdoor billboards, and direct postal marketing. These channels share a defining structural feature — they are broadcast mediums designed to deliver a standardised message to a large, relatively undifferentiated audience.

The emergence of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s inaugurated a fundamentally new advertising paradigm. The first banner advertisement, placed by AT&T on the HotWired website in October 1994, achieved a click-through rate of approximately 44 percent — a figure reflecting novelty rather than enduring behaviour (Goldfarb



and Tucker, 2011). Over the following three decades, online advertising grew from a curiosity into the dominant form of commercial communication. According to eMarketer (2024), global digital advertising revenue reached approximately 616 billion US dollars in 2024, representing roughly 68 percent of total global advertising expenditure of 908 billion US dollars.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

The juxtaposition of online and traditional advertising is not merely a matter of technological preference; it reflects deeper tensions between mass-market and individualised communication, between brand-building and performance marketing, and between long-term equity creation and short-term conversion optimisation. For practitioners, channel allocation decisions carry direct implications for revenue, market share, and brand positioning. For scholars, the comparison illuminates fundamental questions about media effects, consumer behaviour, and the political economy of attention. This paper addresses both dimensions, proposing a practical framework informed by rigorous theoretical and empirical analysis.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper are fivefold: (i) to trace the historical development of both advertising paradigms; (ii) to explicate the core technical mechanisms distinguishing them; (iii) to assess the comparative benefits and limitations of each approach with empirical evidence; (iv) to examine the regulatory and ethical context governing each medium; and (v) to propose an original conceptual framework for integrated advertising decision-making.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Foundational Theories of Advertising Effectiveness

The scholarly study of advertising effectiveness has a rich intellectual history predating the digital era. Colley's (1961) DAGMAR model — Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results — established a hierarchical framework in which advertising moves consumers through sequential cognitive stages from unawareness to action. This model, along with the hierarchy-of-effects framework of Lavidge and Steiner (1961), became foundational to evaluating traditional advertising channels against sequential communication objectives.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) distinguished between central and peripheral routes to persuasion. Highly involved consumers process advertising messages critically, while less involved consumers respond to peripheral cues such as aesthetics, celebrity endorsement, or media credibility. This distinction is directly relevant to comparing the two advertising paradigms, as online and traditional media engage fundamentally different levels of consumer involvement and persuasion mechanisms.

Ehrenberg (1974) offered a contrarian perspective, arguing that advertising functions primarily to reinforce existing brand preferences rather than convert non-users. This nudge model, elaborated by Sharp (2010) in *How Brands Grow*, has significant implications for evaluating digital advertising's emphasis on direct response, suggesting that brand equity effects are poorly captured by click-through rates and cost-per-acquisition metrics alone.

### 2.2 Research on Digital Advertising Effectiveness

Goldfarb and Tucker (2011) conducted influential empirical research demonstrating that the combination of obtrusive advertising format and precise audience targeting could more than double purchase intentions relative to either variable alone, but that highly personal targeting combined with intrusiveness could generate a privacy backlash. This finding anticipated public debates about behavioural targeting that have intensified with data collection practices and privacy regulations such as the GDPR.

Naik and Raman (2003) introduced the concept of advertising synergy, demonstrating through econometric modelling that simultaneous investment in multiple advertising media produces effects greater than the sum of individual media investments. Dinner, Van Heerde, and Neslin (2014) subsequently confirmed that television



advertising has a strong amplifying effect on search behaviour driven by online advertising — a finding with direct strategic implications for integrated channel planning.

### **2.3 Comparative Effectiveness Studies**

Sethuraman, Tellis, and Briesch (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of advertising elasticity studies spanning several decades, finding that advertising elasticity for both traditional and digital media was positive but modest — typically between 0.1 and 0.2 — and that returns on advertising investment had declined as markets became more saturated. Chandy and colleagues (2001) demonstrated that emotional advertising content tended to be more effective for established brands, while informational content was more effective for new brands, a distinction with direct relevance to comparing television's emotional storytelling with search advertising's information-dense formats.

## **III. CORE MECHANISMS: TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING**

### **3.1 Television Advertising**

Television advertising represents the apex of the traditional paradigm in terms of reach, creative production values, and cultural impact. A thirty-second commercial broadcast during a major sporting event can reach tens of millions of viewers simultaneously — creating a shared cultural moment that no digital medium has fully replicated at comparable scale. According to Nielsen (2023), live television accounted for approximately 28 percent of total media consumption time among adults in the United States. The high cost of entry — a sixty-second national commercial in the United States may cost between 500,000 and several million dollars to produce — has historically advantaged large incumbent brands and disadvantaged new entrants.

### **3.2 Print Advertising**

Print advertising in newspapers and magazines has experienced prolonged structural decline coinciding with the rise of digital media. Total US newspaper advertising revenue declined from approximately 49 billion US dollars in 2005 to less than 8 billion US dollars in 2022 — a contraction exceeding 80 percent (Pew Research Center, 2023). Despite this, prestige titles such as *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, and *Vogue* retain significant credibility signals. Research by the Advertising Association and PwC consistently shows that advertising in trusted editorial environments generates higher recall and more favourable brand attitudes than the same advertisement in an uncontextualised digital environment.

### **3.3 Radio and Out-of-Home Advertising**

Radio reaches approximately 82 percent of the American adult population each week, maintaining a reach profile comparable to broadcast television (Radio Advertising Bureau, 2023). It is characterised by low production costs, geographic and format-based targeting, and high-frequency repetition within modest budgets. Out-of-home advertising — encompassing billboards, transit advertisements, and digital street furniture — generated approximately 8.6 billion US dollars in revenue in the United States in 2023 (OAAA, 2024). Programmatic digital out-of-home, which enables dynamic content delivery optimised by real-time data signals, represents the fastest-growing segment and marks a meaningful convergence between traditional and digital advertising paradigms.

## **IV. CORE MECHANISMS: ONLINE ADVERTISING**

### **4.1 Search Engine Advertising**

Search engine advertising — principally through Google Ads and Microsoft Advertising — constitutes the most commercially significant development in advertising history. The pay-per-click auction model, pioneered by Overture and refined by Google with the introduction of AdWords in 2000, enables advertisers to purchase visibility in search results in response to specific queries entered by users actively seeking information or products. The alignment between user intent and advertising message is the defining advantage: unlike traditional media, search advertising is



displayed precisely when a consumer has expressed relevant interest through their query. Google Search advertising alone generated approximately 175 billion US dollars in 2023 (Alphabet Inc., 2023).

#### **4.2 Social Media Advertising**

Social media advertising, through platforms including Meta (Facebook and Instagram), TikTok, LinkedIn, and Snapchat, collectively commands hundreds of billions of dollars in annual revenue. Meta enables advertisers to define audiences based on demographic characteristics, geographic location, interests, life events, and lookalike modelling — identifying users whose behavioural profiles resemble existing customers. According to Hootsuite's Digital 2024 Global Overview, short-form video generates engagement rates approximately three times higher than static image posts across major platforms, making it the dominant creative currency of social media advertising as of 2024.

#### **4.3 Programmatic Advertising**

Programmatic advertising refers to the automated purchase and placement of advertising inventory through technology platforms — most commonly through real-time bidding auctions conducted in milliseconds as web pages load. The ecosystem comprises demand-side platforms representing advertisers, supply-side platforms representing publishers, and ad exchanges facilitating matching. According to eMarketer (2024), programmatic transactions now account for approximately 90 percent of all digital display advertising in the United States. The deprecation of third-party cookies across major browsers is compelling the industry to accelerate contextual targeting, cohort-based solutions, and authenticated identity methodologies built on first-party data.

#### **4.4 Influencer and Native Advertising**

Influencer marketing leverages the social capital of content creators across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and podcasting networks. Influencer Marketing Hub (2023) estimated the global influencer marketing industry reached 21.1 billion US dollars — growing from less than 2 billion US dollars in 2016. The strategic logic rests on parasocial relationships between creators and followers, which endow endorsements with a credibility and intimacy that traditional advertising rarely achieves. Nielsen (2022) found that 71 percent of consumers trust influencer opinions compared with 33 percent who trust banner advertising — a differential with significant implications for medium selection in trust-sensitive product categories.

## **V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS**

### **5.1 Advantages of Online Advertising**

The most cited advantage of online advertising is precision audience targeting. While a television advertisement reaches an audience defined by broad programme demographics, digital advertising enables targeting at granular levels combining demographic, geographic, interest, behavioural, and intentional signals. Retargeting technology — serving advertisements to users who previously visited an advertiser's website — achieves click-through rates approximately ten times higher than standard display advertisements, and retargeted consumers are 70 percent more likely to complete a purchase (Criteo, 2023).

Measurability represents a second transformative advantage. Digital metrics extend from impressions and unique reach through engagement and video completion rates to conversion metrics encompassing purchases and revenue generated. Multi-touch attribution modelling provides a more accurate picture of channel contribution than the panel-based ratings estimates that underpin traditional media measurement. Cost efficiency and flexible budgeting further advantage digital channels, with pay-per-click and cost-per-acquisition pricing models enabling advertisers to pay only for measurable consumer actions rather than broadcast impressions.



### **5.2 Advantages of Traditional Advertising**

Despite structural pressures, traditional advertising retains unmatched capacity for generating mass simultaneous reach and cultural resonance. The Super Bowl, attracting approximately 115 million US viewers annually, commands an average price of 7 million US dollars per thirty-second advertisement — reflecting the unique value of simultaneous exposure to a culturally engaged national audience. Nielsen (2023) research consistently demonstrates that television advertising generates among the highest levels of advertising recall across all media formats, particularly for emotionally engaging creative executions.

There is substantial evidence that advertising in established traditional media environments benefits from a credibility transfer that programmatic digital advertising struggles to replicate. Research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2023) confirms that consumers attribute significantly higher credibility to advertising appearing in established print and broadcast outlets than on social media or unfamiliar websites. For brand categories where trust is a primary purchase criterion — financial services, healthcare, insurance — the credibility associations of premium traditional placements justify their higher absolute cost.

### **5.3 Challenges and Risks**

Online advertising faces significant systemic risks. The Association of National Advertisers estimated that advertisers globally lost approximately 84 billion US dollars to ad fraud in 2023 — approximately 14 percent of total global digital advertising spend. Brand safety incidents, in which programmatic systems place advertisements alongside extremist or inappropriate content, triggered a crisis of confidence in 2017 that prompted the Global Alliance for Responsible Media to develop industry-wide safety standards. Privacy concerns around behavioural targeting, amplified by Zuboff's (2019) concept of surveillance capitalism, have accelerated regulatory intervention and consumer resistance.

Traditional advertising confronts audience fragmentation as the central structural challenge. The proliferation of streaming services — Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney Plus, Apple TV Plus — has dramatically reduced audience concentration around any single programme or channel, making it increasingly expensive to achieve a given level of gross rating points. The inability of traditional advertising to facilitate consumer response, personalisation, or immediate purchase action represents a growing competitive disadvantage as consumer expectations evolve toward interactive brand relationships.

## **VI. CASE STUDIES**

### **6.1 Procter and Gamble: Recalibrating Digital Investment**

Procter and Gamble, among the world's largest advertisers with annual expenditure exceeding 8 billion US dollars, offers one of the most instructive case studies in the online-traditional tension. In 2017, Chief Brand Officer Marc Pritchard publicly withdrew approximately 200 million US dollars from digital advertising, citing brand safety concerns, fraudulent bot traffic, and inadequate measurement standards. Pritchard's challenge to the digital industry to adopt third-party viewability standards became a pivotal inflection point in digital advertising accountability. Subsequently, Procter and Gamble adopted a more analytically rigorous integrated approach — continuing to invest substantially in both television and digital while demanding greater accountability from platforms.

### **6.2 Nike: Integrated Emotional Brand Building**

Nike's advertising strategy exemplifies sophisticated integration of online and traditional channels in service of a consistent emotional narrative. From the iconic 1988 'Just Do It' campaign through the 2018 'Dream Crazy' campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick, Nike has deployed television's emotional storytelling capacity to build cultural associations around athletic achievement, personal determination, and social courage. These narratives are simultaneously amplified through digital channels — social media drives real-time engagement, YouTube extends narrative depth, and performance advertising converts brand awareness into product purchase.



### 6.3 Coca-Cola: The Share a Coke Campaign

Coca-Cola's Share a Coke campaign, which personalised product packaging with popular names, demonstrated the power of traditional product innovation to generate organic digital content far exceeding what paid advertising could achieve alone. The campaign generated more than 500,000 photographs of personalised bottles shared on social media and increased US volume sales for the first time in more than a decade. The case illustrates that the most effective integrated campaigns create a virtuous cycle: traditional media generates awareness and triggers behaviour, while digital channels amplify, extend, and measure the response.

## VII. REGULATORY AND ETHICAL LANDSCAPE

### 7.1 Data Privacy Regulation

The regulatory environment governing advertising has undergone rapid change since 2016. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, entering into force on 25 May 2018, established the most comprehensive data protection framework in the world, requiring that the collection and processing of personal data for behavioural advertising be based on explicit, freely given, specific, and informed consent. In the United States, the California Consumer Privacy Act and its successor the California Privacy Rights Act (2023) establish significant privacy rights with practical nationwide implications given California's commercial importance.

Apple's introduction of App Tracking Transparency in iOS 14.5 required users to explicitly opt in to cross-app tracking, resulting in opt-in rates of approximately 25 percent in the United States (Flurry Analytics, 2022). The downstream impact on Meta's advertising revenue was estimated at approximately 10 billion US dollars in 2022 alone, illustrating the fragility of targeting infrastructure built on third-party data signals. The deprecation of third-party cookies by Google Chrome — following earlier moves by Apple's Safari and Mozilla Firefox — further compounds these structural pressures on the digital advertising ecosystem.

### 7.2 Advertising Standards and Platform Regulation

The Federal Trade Commission in the United States and the Advertising Standards Authority in the United Kingdom require clear disclosure of material connections between influencers and the brands they promote, pursuing enforcement actions against brands and influencers failing to disclose paid partnerships. The EU's Digital Markets Act (2022) established a regulatory framework for digital gatekeepers that imposes interoperability requirements and prohibitions on self-preferencing practices directly relevant to the advertising technology ecosystem. Meanwhile, US Department of Justice antitrust litigation against Google, filed in 2023, alleges illegal monopolisation of multiple markets in the digital advertising technology stack.

## VIII. FUTURE TRENDS

### 8.1 Artificial Intelligence and Generative Creative

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are increasingly central to advertising execution and optimisation. Machine learning powers real-time bidding decisions, dynamic creative optimisation, predictive audience modelling, and automated campaign management. Google's Performance Max and Meta's Advantage Plus represent the current frontier of AI-driven automation, in which advertisers provide creative assets and objectives while algorithmic systems autonomously manage targeting, placement, and bidding. Generative AI tools including Adobe Firefly, Midjourney, and Runway are transforming creative production, enabling rapid generation of visual content at a fraction of traditional production costs. WPP's 2023 partnership with Nvidia to develop AI-powered content creation infrastructure signals that generative AI is a fundamental force in the industry's evolution.

### 8.2 Connected Television and Retail Media

Connected television represents the most significant convergence of traditional television's emotional reach and digital advertising's targeting precision. According to eMarketer (2024), connected television advertising



expenditure in the United States reached approximately 25 billion US dollars in 2024, projected to grow at a compound annual rate exceeding 15 percent through 2027. Platforms including Hulu, Amazon Prime Video's advertising tier, Netflix's emerging advertising business, and Roku's marketplace enable precision-targeted delivery in the premium large-screen environment that defines traditional television advertising's creative advantage.

Retail media networks — in which major retailers monetise their digital properties and first-party customer data — represent one of the fastest-growing advertising sectors. Amazon's advertising business generated approximately 47 billion US dollars in revenue in 2023. Walmart Connect, Kroger Precision Marketing, and Target's Roundel are collectively creating a substantial new channel characterised by high purchase intent audiences and rich transactional data, expected to become one of the dominant advertising formats of the late 2020s.

## **IX. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK: THE INTEGRATED ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS MODEL**

### **9.1 Conceptual Foundations**

Drawing on the theoretical literature reviewed in this paper, empirical evidence of comparative effectiveness, and strategic case study observations, this paper proposes the Integrated Advertising Effectiveness Model (IAEM) as a conceptual framework to guide channel allocation decisions. The IAEM is grounded in four foundational observations: first, neither online nor traditional advertising is inherently superior, but each is relatively superior for specific objectives, audiences, and categories; second, synergistic effects between channels mean that an integrated multi-channel approach typically outperforms any single-channel strategy; third, effective strategy must be anchored in clearly defined, measurable objectives rather than media channel preferences; and fourth, channel decisions must be continuously informed by measurement and optimisation rather than fixed media plans.

### **9.2 The Five Dimensions of the IAEM**

The IAEM operates across five analytical dimensions. The first dimension is Campaign Objective Alignment, requiring advertisers to classify their primary objective among four categories: brand awareness and cultural positioning; brand consideration and preference building; direct response and conversion; and customer retention and loyalty. The relative priority of online and traditional channels differs materially across these objectives, with television demonstrating superior performance on brand awareness and search advertising demonstrating superior performance on conversion.

The second dimension is Audience Characteristics Assessment, requiring analysis of the target audience's media consumption habits, digital platform engagement, and stage in the brand relationship. The third dimension is Product and Category Considerations, reflecting that product complexity, purchase involvement, and category convention significantly influence optimal channel selection. The fourth dimension is Budgetary Parameters, recognising that the absolute and relative costs of traditional and digital channels create different efficiency profiles. The fifth dimension is Measurement and Optimisation Infrastructure, reflecting that digital advertising's measurability advantage is contingent on the advertiser's capacity to collect, integrate, and act upon performance data.

### **9.3 Synergy Assessment and Channel Integration**

Critically, the IAEM incorporates a synergy assessment module that evaluates the potential for channel combinations to generate effects greater than the sum of their individual contributions. Three primary synergy mechanisms are identified: search lift from television, in which television campaigns demonstrably increase the volume of branded and category search queries; social amplification of traditional creative, in which distinctive traditional campaigns generate earned media through social commentary and sharing; and sequential retargeting of traditional media audiences, in which digital campaigns reinforce messages to consumers previously exposed to traditional advertising. The framework emphasises that channel allocation should be treated as a hypothesis to be tested, refined continuously through measurement and experimentation.



## X. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a comprehensive comparative analysis of online and traditional advertising, traversing their historical development, theoretical foundations, technical architectures, and empirical effectiveness records. The central finding is unambiguous: the binary opposition between online and traditional advertising that characterises much popular discourse is an intellectually inadequate frame for strategic decision-making. The empirical evidence consistently supports the conclusion that integrated campaigns spanning multiple channels generate superior outcomes to single-channel approaches, and that the optimal combination depends on a systematic assessment of campaign objectives, audience characteristics, product category, budget parameters, and measurement infrastructure.

Traditional advertising retains genuine and irreplaceable strengths in mass reach, emotional brand storytelling, consumer trust, and cultural impact. The premature abandonment of traditional channels — exemplified by Procter and Gamble's subsequent recalibration after its 2017 digital over-rotation — carries real risks of brand equity erosion. Online advertising has demonstrated transformative advantages in targeting precision, measurability, cost efficiency, interactivity, and the democratisation of advertising access for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The proposed Integrated Advertising Effectiveness Model offers a structured conceptual framework that marketing practitioners and researchers can use to navigate these complexities with greater analytical rigour. The future of advertising will be shaped by artificial intelligence, privacy regulation, connected television, retail media networks, and evolving consumer media consumption. Navigating this future successfully will require both the disciplined rigour of empirical measurement and the creative audacity of ambitious brand building — resisting the temptation to reduce the rich complexity of advertising strategy to the false certainty of channel rankings or algorithmic optimisation alone.

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